

Data Standards – A Voluntary Medium to Facilitate Data Exchange

Data standards establish a common language across organizations and can facilitate easier and more accurate information exchange among State and Tribal environmental agencies and EPA. Data Standards are documented agreements on formats and definitions of common data. Key elements of a data standard consist of data element names, definitions, data type and formatting prescriptions. A data standard may also include some guidance for usage to facilitate and promote its widespread use.

Adoption of standards does not dictate an internal system redesign. In fact, with standards defined as the means of data **exchange**, the need for internal similarities between State and EPA systems will be reduced. The standards that have been approved or are being considered are intended in the joint State/Tribal/EPA context specifically for data exchange purposes. The existence of a data exchange standard and the desire of an agency to use that standard may be considerations as organizations plan information management procedures and systems.

The adoption of standards by the Environmental Data Standards Council does not bind agencies (States or Tribes or EPA) to use a standard. Adoption means that the standard represents a set of sound practices and that it has been through a reasonable review process. It is up to the individual agency to determine if, when, and how it might use the standard.

A standard may indicate that a specific data element is required in a given context. This means that it is necessary to provide sufficient information for exchange and use of that data item or set. Such terminology is unavoidable in distinguishing the minimum set of data that can usefully be said to meet the standard. It should not be interpreted to imply that all agencies must implement the standard, or report that specific data. The endorsement of a standard by EPA does not by itself create any new reporting requirements. Any changes to the content or format of State/Tribe reporting to EPA must be accomplished through negotiations between individual States and EPA as part of individual State-EPA agreements (e.g. PPAs). New reporting requirements are subject to the normal OMB Information Collection Act processes.